

# ANNUAL

# 4202

# REPORT



**BRONZEVILLE**  
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

## MISSION

The Bronzeville Center for the Arts (BCA) is committed to empowering the next generation of artists and art professionals. We invite the public to unleash their creativity through engaging exhibitions, comprehensive education programs, and immersive artistic experiences that foster community connection and appreciation for Black art and artists.



# WHO WE ARE

**GODFREY KAHN**

**FOLEY**  
FOLEY & LARDNER LLP



**MUELLER**  
COMMUNICATIONS



**MATT THACKER**

**SAMANTHA WILSON**

**TIMOTHY NORRIS**

## ACKNOWLEDGING OUR DONORS

The BCA extends profound gratitude to our community of supporters whose generous contributions throughout 2024 have propelled our mission forward. Your investment has enabled significant progress in our vision to create a transformative space celebrating African American arts, culture, and education in Milwaukee.

Through your partnership, we continue laying the groundwork for vibrant exhibitions, dynamic educational initiatives, and an inclusive gathering place to enrich the historic Bronzeville neighborhood. To each donor who has joined us on this journey of bringing artistic excellence and cultural celebration to life—we thank you.

# MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

2024 has been a transformative year for the Bronzeville Center for the Arts, highlighted by the opening of Gallery 507, our flagship space in Milwaukee's historic Bronzeville Cultural District.

In its inaugural year, Gallery 507 has emerged as a vibrant community hub, hosting various initiatives, from our holiday artisan marketplace to the inspiring Hip Hop Architecture Camp for young creatives. The recently unveiled mural by Brad Anthony Bernard and students from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design (MIAD) serves as a powerful testament to our dedication to public art and the empowerment of future community leaders and artists.

We are also thrilled to announce the selection of BrandNu Design Studio as the lead architect for Milwaukee's first Black arts and culture museum. This pivotal decision propels us closer to realizing our vision for a world-class institution that celebrates and uplifts Black art and culture.

As we move forward, our focus remains on fostering spaces that honor Black creativity while driving community and economic development in Bronzeville. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our donors, partners, staff, and the Milwaukee community for your unwavering support in achieving these milestones.

With appreciation,

**Kristen Hardy**  
Board Chair  
Bronzeville Center for the Arts



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Terri Boxer, Secretary  
Willie Smith, Treasurer  
Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, Member  
Sande Robinson, Member  
Damani Short, Member

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Kevin Hickman, Bookkeeper  
Mutòpe J. Johnson, Director of Creative  
Engagement & Partnerships  
Cheryl Obermeyer, Interim CFO  
John Russick, Managing Director

# SHAPING THE FUTURE

In 2024, the BCA celebrated the addition of Erin Harkey as executive director. Erin brought with her more than 20 years of experience in arts administration and cultural development, including from her previous role as the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE). During her tenure at DCASE, Harkey secured over \$200 million in new resources, including significant grants and donations to support public art, historic preservation, and arts programming. She also led strategic planning efforts for cultural institutions and implemented ambitious projects such as the Chicago Monuments Project and the Chicago Public Art Plan.



With a master's in urban planning and a demonstrated ability to cultivate powerful public/private partnerships, Harkey brought both vision and execution to the BCA. Her portfolio, rich with creating jobs for artists, activating spaces, developing public art, and establishing new cultural facilities, uniquely qualified her to oversee the new Gallery 507 headquarters and the planning, design, construction, community integration, and operational elements of the BCA's future destination arts museum.

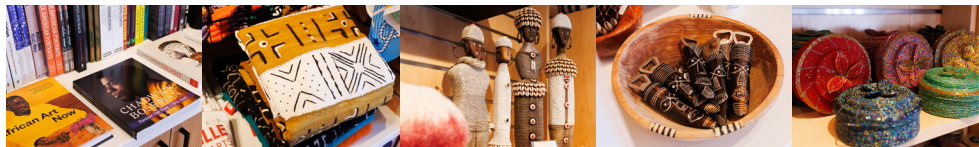
In 2024, the Bronzeville Center for the Arts (BCA) officially opened Gallery 507, its headquarters and community hub. Gallery 507 is the BCA's first development in the heart of Milwaukee's Bronzeville District at 507 W. North Ave. The 3,500-square-foot facility is also home to a gallery, a maker space, and a retail area. The space was designed to reflect and celebrate the Bronzeville neighborhood while providing new, engaging ways to interact with art and artists.

## THE OPENING OF

# GALLERY 507

## GALLERY 507 GIFT SHOP

In December 2024, Gallery 507's Gift Shop opened its doors to the greater community. The shop offers a curated collection of gifts from Milwaukee small businesses and international artisans from Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, Haiti, Kenya, the United Kingdom, Cameroon, and more. The shop featured a variety of gifts for the holidays, including books, ornaments, statues, purses, soaps, cards, tea towels, puzzles, games, dolls, apparel, and dishware. Total sales were \$2,318.52, and we had a total of 37 visitors. All proceeds from the shop directly supported the BCA's future endeavors. The shop will open for special events in 2025.



# BUILDING BCA

## BRONZEVILLE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The BCA took a major step forward in 2024 with the selection of key partners to bring its visionary art museum to life. BrandNu Design Studio, led by nationally recognized Hip Hop Architect Michael Ford, was named the lead architecture firm, partnering with HGA to guide the next phase of design and community engagement. With landscape design by the acclaimed Hood Design Studio and development expertise from Milwaukee-based Emem Group, the project is grounded in a shared commitment to cultural preservation, equity, and community impact.

## BRANDNU DESIGN STUDIO

In August 2024, the BCA announced BrandNu Design Studio as the lead architecture firm for its highly anticipated art museum in the heart of Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood. BrandNu Design is owned by Michael Ford, known nationally as the "Hip Hop Architect".

BrandNu Design is partnering with HGA to lead the art museum project into the next phase of design development, including site and building design, and community engagement. BrandNu uses design as a tool to advance equity, justice, and inclusion, actively working with communities to build a more equitable future, which perfectly aligns with the mission of the BCA.

BrandNu Design, which has offices in Madison, Dallas, and New York specializes in cultural centers and museums, with a design portfolio that includes the Universal Hip Hop Museum in New York and the Black Inventors Hall of Fame Museum in New Jersey. Ford was named Young Architect of The Year by Wisconsin's Chapter of The American Institute of Architects in 2022.

## HGA

HGA is a national interdisciplinary design firm dedicated to creating lasting, positive impact through research-driven, holistic solutions. With a team of over 1,000 architects, engineers, interior designers, and planners, HGA approaches every project with a deep sense of curiosity and responsibility, shaping environments that are both innovative and meaningful. Truly sustainable design is centered on the human experience, ensuring that spaces are not only beautiful and functional but also foster community well-being and responsible, long-term development.

As a partner in the design of the BCA's art museum, HGA will collaborate with BrandNu Design to provide design and technical expertise in bringing the museum to life. The project team includes Design Principal Peter Cook, FAIA, NOMA—who played a key role in designing the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture—and Terri Howard, HGA's Director of Equity, whose leadership helps ensure inclusivity and community engagement remain at the forefront of the design process. Through this collaboration, HGA is honored to contribute to a project that will elevate African American art while strengthening the Bronzeville community for generations to come.



"This is an incredible opportunity to help shape the design of a new museum that will become a community hub within a revitalized Bronzeville. This world-class museum will both represent the rich history of the neighborhood and forecast its future." - Michael Ford, owner



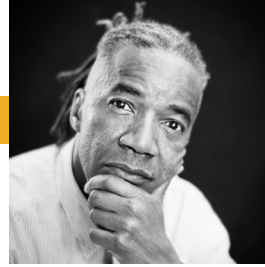
"Developing the design in partnership with BrandNu Design is an excellent opportunity to combine our unique skills and experience to create something remarkable." - Peter Cook, Design Principal



## HOOD DESIGN STUDIO

Hood Design Studio, Inc. was selected to be the landscape designer for the project. Founded in 1992 and based in Oakland, California, Hood Design Studio, Inc. is an internationally acclaimed social art and design practice led by Walter Hood. The studio's work integrates three complementary practices: art and fabrication, design and landscape, and research and urbanism, enabling them to create deeply contextualized solutions that respond to the specific cultural, historical, and environmental characteristics of each site.

At the heart of the studio's philosophy is a commitment to revealing and amplifying the hidden narratives and cultural patterns within public spaces, transforming ordinary urban environments into meaningful places that reflect and celebrate community heritage. Their approach to design transcends traditional boundaries, acknowledging that places can hold multiple meanings for different communities – making them an ideal partner for cultural institutions seeking to create spaces that resonate with historical significance while pointing toward future possibilities.



*"This project represents a powerful opportunity to create a space where art, landscape, and community converge to tell essential stories. Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood holds deep cultural significance, and our design approach aims to strengthen these endemic patterns while creating new ways to experience and celebrate African American art and culture. This museum won't just be a building – it will be a living landscape that connects visitors to both the historical resonance and the contemporary vibrancy of Black artistic expression."*

- Walter Hood, creative director and founder

## EMEM GROUP

Emem Group, a Milwaukee-based real estate firm established in 2014, brings vital expertise to the Bronzeville Center for the Arts as Owner's Representative. Under the leadership of President and CEO Michael Emem, the firm has played a crucial role in advancing the project through site acquisition and architectural team selection. With a proven track record of managing over \$50M in commercial development projects and \$6M in design-build initiatives, Emem Group specializes in real estate development, owner's representation, and development consulting services.

The firm's commitment to mission-based, community-centered projects aligns perfectly with the BCA's vision of elevating Black art and artists in our cultural landscape. Emem Group's dedication to strengthening historically disinvested neighborhoods and fostering equitable, inclusive developments makes them an ideal partner in bringing this transformative cultural institution to life.



*"We are on the verge of seeing a place where artists, art enthusiasts, community building and vision intersect. It is an honor assisting BCA in bringing this first of its kind art and cultural asset to life in Milwaukee's Bronzeville district."*

- Deshea Agee, Vice President;  
Michael Emem, President and CEO

Community engagement stands at the heart of the Bronzeville Center for the Arts' mission as the foundation for building meaningful connections between art, culture, and the people we serve.

Throughout 2024, the BCA deepened its roots in the community, bringing together residents, artists, and cultural leaders in dynamic and transformative ways. From the groundbreaking Hip Hop Architecture Camp to community listening sessions at America's Black Holocaust Museum and vibrant activities during Bronzeville Week, each initiative reinforced our commitment to making art accessible, relevant, and deeply connected to the community's voice and vision.

These engagements did more than create memorable experiences – they established lasting dialogues between the BCA and the community, ensuring that our growth and programming continue to reflect and serve Bronzeville's rich cultural heritage and aspirations.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



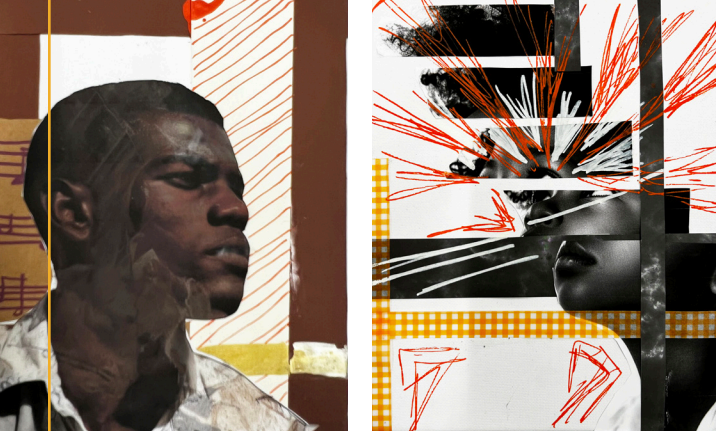
## HIP HOP ARCHITECTURE CAMP

In August 2024, the BCA hosted the Hip Hop Architecture Camp, led by "the Hip Hop Architect," Michael Ford of BrandNu Design Studio. The week-long intensive experience introduced local youth to architecture, urban planning, and creative place-making through the lens of hip hop culture.

The free camp, which took place during Bronzeville Week at Gallery 507, invited 30 Milwaukee students in grades 6–12 to develop architectural concepts for the BCA, expressing their visions through rap verses and music video production. The camp participants learned from top architects, urban planners, designers, community activists, and hip hop artists throughout the week.

The camp allowed local youth to explore the various opportunities in architecture, urban planning, and design while also discussing how these fields can shape the neighborhoods and communities around them. The camp encouraged participants to explore STEM fields, form genuine connections with their fellow campers, and familiarize themselves with the Bronzeville Center for the Arts and its mission.





## JUNETEENTH & BRONZEVILLE WEEK

Community collages were created during Juneteenth and Bronzeville Week events that were designed to empower Bronzeville residents to voice their opinions about decisions affecting their lives and community.

The arranging and rearranging of materials appealed to the individual makers' desire to create something new. Our goal was to use the creative process to connect community residents, stakeholders, and the BCA project team to build an ongoing dialogue that would inform the design of the future museum.



## COMMUNITY LISTENING EVENTS

In September 2024, the BCA hosted a listening event at America's Black Holocaust Museum in partnership with Hood Design Studio. Neighborhood residents and community members shared personal memories, stories, and aspirations for Bronzeville.

The BCA's staff also asked attendees to contribute to a cultural asset map that Hester Tittman of Rabbit Rabbit Studio developed for Hood Design. The map created a historical timeline of the Bronzeville neighborhood, tracking commercial and cultural development since the early 19th century, when the first Black residents arrived. The map will orient Hood Design to the history of the site and inspire potential design schemes.



## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis

Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis, M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D., is a distinguished arts educator, fine artist, and art historian whose work shapes disciplinary dialogues around African American art history, visual culture, and feminism. Former Evjue-Bascom Professor, High is Emerita Professor of African and African American Art History and Visual Culture of the Departments of African American Studies, Gender & Women's Studies, and Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. High's artwork has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is discussed in numerous art historical publications. She is a recipient of the 2021 James A. Porter Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard University and a recipient of the 2022 Legacy/ Lifetime Achievement Wisconsin Visual Artists Award from the Museum of Wisconsin Art, Wisconsin Visual Artists, and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.



"In 2019, the vision for an art museum in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood was sparked by a Facebook post of artist, Della Wells, which caught the attention of an anonymous donor. I, a Madisonian with ties to Milwaukee and a passion for the arts, joined Della, artist Mutòpe Johnson, and others in the initial discussions about the museum's mission and audience in November that year. By 2020, our group had grown and formally incorporated as the Bronzeville Center for the Arts (BCA), aiming to cocreate a space that celebrates artists of African descent through exhibitions, workshops, and educational programs.

In 2024, we celebrated the opening of our headquarters, Gallery 507, marked by unveiling a stunning mural, *Homage to Bronzeville*, by Professor Brad A. Bernard and his students of the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. Speeches from local leaders, including Mayor Cavalier Johnson and Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs, filled the air with optimism about the museum's future and its potential to enrich Milwaukee's cultural landscape.

The BCA aims to nurture emerging artists and to invite the community to explore its creativity through immersive programming. We envision the BCA as a vibrant hub that preserves the legacy of Bronzeville, while elevating African diaspora art in our cultural consciousness. Our dedicated volunteers and committee members, including art professionals like Dr. Faisal Abdu'Allah, Ms. Vicki Meek, Ms. Sande Robinson, Dr. Polly Morris, and Ms. Juliette Bethea, among others, are crucial in advancing this vision.

As the Chair of the Collections Committee, I am deeply grateful for the collaborative spirit that drives us toward the realization of the BCA. Inspired by Dr. Samella Sanders Lewis to document from our perspective those meaningful aesthetic, social, and political realities of our world, we are committed to preserving the rich history and achievements of artists of African descent, and to fostering future generations."

- Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis



# TREASURER'S REPORT

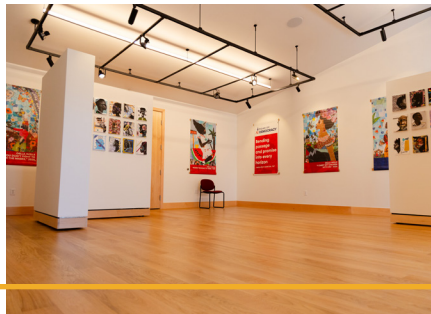
As Treasurer of the Bronzeville Center for the Arts, I am pleased to report on a strong fiscal year that ended December 31, 2024. The year ended with \$27.3 million in total assets and net revenue of \$16 million. The BCA operated with a \$850,000 budget for fiscal 2024 and finished the year with a modest operating budget surplus.

Assets include the newly completed Gallery 507, \$8.1 million in investments, and a \$13.8 million pledge receivable, the balance of a \$25 million contribution pledged to support building the Museum at 2312 Martin Luther King Drive.

Net revenue included a \$2.8 million project cost reimbursement from a \$5 million Wisconsin ARPA grant awarded to the BCA and recording the \$13.8 million contribution balance. Other revenue includes investment income and gift shop sales.

As seen throughout the annual report, the BCA operated with sound financial management, which supported the past year's achievements. We are incredibly grateful for the support of our dedicated trustees and staff. Their collective efforts allow us to carry out our mission each year in fresh and creative ways.

**Willie Smith**  
Treasurer



NET REVENUE:

**\$16M**

**\$27.3M**  
IN TOTAL ASSETS

## 2024

### MARKETING REPORT

In 2024, our marketing initiatives successfully amplified the Bronzeville Center for the Arts' presence in Milwaukee's cultural landscape.



The unveiling of the collaborative mural project with MIAD students and artist Brad Anthony Bernard also generated considerable press coverage, reinforcing our position as a catalyst for artistic development in the community.



The grand opening of Gallery 507 garnered media attention and community engagement, drawing diverse audiences to our flagship space.



Strategic communications around the selection of BrandNu Design Studio as lead architect for our future museum project helped build anticipation for this landmark development while highlighting our commitment to advancing Black arts and culture in Milwaukee.



We also received media coverage of key events, including the Holiday Artisan Marketplace and the Hip Hop Architecture Camp.



Through carefully crafted messaging and community-focused promotion, we strengthened our brand identity as both a cultural destination and a driving force for economic development in the historic Bronzeville Cultural District.

## LOOKING AHEAD

In 2025, the BCA will embark on a new research project led by historian Chris Dingwall called the Cultural Infrastructures of Black Milwaukee, which will explore the history of art, design, and craft that made Milwaukee a regional center of African American cultural work and enterprise from the middle of the twentieth century to today.

The research will ask several questions, including how African American artists, designers, and craftspeople develop and sustain their practices in Milwaukee. What infrastructures did they build to support African American cultural production in an age of urban crisis? What legacy does their work leave for African American cultural life in the early twenty-first century? This research project will lead to an exhibition of African American art and design history in Milwaukee based on the strength of local archives and collections.



KEN BROWN